

Whitefish Transportation Plan Urban Corridor Study of US 93 Public Information Meeting #3 Summary (01/10/08)

Introduction

The third public open house informational meeting for the Whitefish Transportation Plan and Urban Corridor Study of US 93 projects was held on Thursday, January 10, 2008 in the O'Shaughnessy Center, 1 Central Avenue. The meeting took place between 7:00 and 9:15 p.m. and included a PowerPoint presentation beginning about 7:15 p.m.

The meeting was attended by the following agency and Consultant Team members:

John Wilson	City of Whitefish
Karin Hilding	City of Whitefish
Sheila Ludlow	MDT Statewide and Urban Planning Section (Helena)
Jeff Key	Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)
Dan Norderud	Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA - Helena)

More than 80 people attended the meeting; however, not all signed the attendance sheets for the meeting since some joined as it progressed. Copies of the sign-in sheets from the meeting (attached) show that 50 people signed the attendance sheets.

Prior to the meeting, the entries from the City's Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest were available for viewing in the foyer of the O'Shaughnessy Center. Informal conversations with attendees occurred prior to and after the public meeting.

Copies of the Executive Summary and a figure showing recommended major street network improvements from the draft Transportation Plan were used as handouts for the meeting.

Meeting Purpose

The primary purpose of this meeting was to present the first "Public Draft" of the Whitefish Transportation Plan document and highlight its major components to the public. The purposes of the informational meeting were to:

- Discuss how a community Transportation Plan is intended to be used and what value it brings to the process;
- Highlight key chapters in the Transportation Plan;
- Describe the process for public review of the document and how to submit written comments; and
- Provide an open forum for questions from the public and answers from the Consultant.

Meeting Summary

Karin Hilding of the City of Whitefish began the meeting by welcoming the public and announcing the winners of the Whitefish Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest. The contest was held to solicit visions about what transportation in Whitefish might be like in the year 2030. She then introduced Jeff Key of Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA), the engineering firm hired by the City and the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) to prepare the Whitefish Transportation Plan.

Mr. Key began his presentation around 7:15 p.m. by introducing representatives of the City of Whitefish, MDT and the Consultant Team. He then began a PowerPoint presentation discussing the Transportation Plan document. Jeff began by advising the audience that the draft Transportation Plan is the “first cut” at a community-wide Transportation Plan and represents only the Consultant’s opinions at this time. He stressed that the Transportation Plan has not yet been adopted or endorsed by the City of Whitefish or the MDT. He commented that the Plan is intended to help guide major transportation system decisions in a community and should be used by elected officials, staff, planners, developers and the public. Since conditions can sometimes change quickly, the Plan needs to be regularly updated to reflect changes in the community and revisit planning assumptions.

He pointed out that the Transportation Plan is intended to be in general compliance with other planning documents in the community. Mr. Key reiterated transportation-related goals outlined in the community’s recently adopted Growth Policy and indicated the recommendations contained in the Transportation Plan are generally consistent with these goals.

Mr. Key advised the audience that a companion project—the US 93 Urban Corridor Study—is underway and involves a detailed analysis of conditions on Spokane Avenue, 2nd Street, and Baker Avenue. The Corridor Study should be completed several months after the Transportation Plan since defining overall transportation system needs and desires, recognizing future land use changes, and the travel demand modeling done for the Plan will provide important information for the Corridor Study.

Summary of the Draft Transportation Plan: Mr. Key then presented a series of slides highlighting several key chapters from the Draft Transportation Plan including:

- **Chapter 1 – Introduction & Background**
- **Chapter 3 – Travel Demand Forecasting**
- **Chapter 6 – School Transportation Considerations**
- **Chapter 8 – Recommended Projects**
- **Chapter 9 – Miscellaneous Transportation System Considerations**

Chapter 1 – Introduction & Background: Mr. Key commented that this chapter summarizes the history, need and value of transportation planning in the community. It presents the “transportation related goals, policies and objectives” currently in place in your community that are elaborated in a variety of planning documents including the Whitefish Growth Policy, Downtown Business District Master Plan, Big Mountain Neighborhood Plan, and others. He stressed that knowing the community’s goals and objectives are crucial in determining whether the Transportation Plan and its recommendations are “on target.”

Chapter 3 – Travel Demand Forecasting: Mr. Key indicated that a crucial step in assessing future (year 2030) transportation system needs was the development of a travel demand model for the Whitefish study area. The travel demand model used by MDT is sensitive and can reliably predict travel patterns based on the location of dwelling units and retail and non-retail jobs. He explained that projected future dwelling units and jobs were allocated to individual Census Blocks within the study area consistent with US Census Bureau projections and assumptions in the Whitefish Growth Policy. He then presented several slides showing how future dwelling units and jobs have been allocated within the study area to each Census Block in the study area. The land use and employment projections suggest that growth will continue in the Whitefish area.

Mr. Key pointed out that the travel demand model developed for the Plan provides a way to estimate future traffic volumes and identify potential roadway needs. He stressed that the traffic volumes generated by the model are not absolutes but allow for a planning level comparison of existing to future conditions.

He then showed several slides illustrating year 2030 projected traffic volumes on Whitefish area roadways. The traffic volumes were generated by MDT's travel demand model and reflect future volumes without any improvements to the road system. He stated that comparing future year traffic volumes against the capacities of roadway types in the community helps identify potential problems and roadway needs.

Mr. Key stressed that without improvements, the traffic generated by this growth will likely continue to place substantial demands on the existing transportation system.

Chapter 6 – School Transportation Considerations: Mr. Key said that along with peak tourism traffic, school traffic issues notably affect traffic flow in Whitefish. He related that this chapter of the Plan discusses a variety of issues experienced at or near schools and presents potential remedies or ideas to address the issues. He noted that the Plan includes considerable discussion about the Safe Routes to School (SRTS) program and its potential benefits.

Chapter 8 – Recommended Projects: Mr. Key then showed a series of slides discussing recommendations for transportation improvements. He pointed out that Chapter 8 of the Plan attempts to provide a range of projects that will enhance the local transportation system. He stated that a fundamental philosophy of the Plan is to focus on creating a strong grid transportation network by increasing east-west and north-south connections. He advised the audience that recommendations show a variety of new corridors that may be desirable if and when development occurs in such areas. He emphasized that all projects recommended in the Plan are an attempt to strengthen the existing transportation system, prepare for the future, increase travel mobility and provide options.

He indicated that the recommended improvements include relatively low cost Transportation System Management (TSM) projects like adding turn bays and making simple improvements at intersections, installing or modifying traffic signals, and doing access control studies. Mr. Key also stated that recommendations include large-scale projects—identified as Major Street Network (MSN) projects—involving roadway reconstruction, new roadway corridors, or other major undertakings. Jeff presented slides showing where MSN projects are proposed within the study area

and highlighted recommended improvements in the Whitefish Beach area.

He pointed out that there are a variety of projects previously identified in the City's Capital Improvements Plan and in the City's Pedestrian and Bicyclist Master Plan that are being carried forward in the Transportation Plan.

Chapter 9 – Miscellaneous Transportation System Considerations: Mr. Key briefly highlighted the content of Chapter 9. He stated that many of the items discussed in the chapter don't really fit into other chapters of the Plan and several topics help "plant the seed" for ideas that may be valid during the planning period. He highlighted the potential for a cooperative transit project between Glacier National Park and gateway communities near the park.

Western Route Alternatives: Mr. Key moved onto a series of slides depicting western route connections between US 93 south and US 93 west of Whitefish. He indicated that work directives for the Transportation Plan required RPA to identify and evaluate potential new western routes that might help alleviate traffic on US 93 through the City. He explained that RPA revisited four potential western alignments considered in the Somers-Whitefish Final EIS. The western route alternatives were modeled to determine potential future traffic volumes on each alignment and their impacts on US 93 and parts of the local road system. Model runs were completed both with and without alternate routes in place to determine their potential to reduce traffic on US 93.

Mr. Key indicated that the Transportation Plan does not recommend a "bypass" route around Whitefish. Although travel demand modeling suggests such a route would draw some traffic, a western route would not solve future traffic issues along the US 93 corridor through Whitefish. He pointed out that the western routes around Whitefish have numerous issues that would likely make such projects difficult to implement including environmental resource constraints, landowner opposition, and high construction and right-of-way costs. For these reasons, the Consultant believes the community is better served by strengthening the transportation grid system and focusing on other improvements.

Commenting on the Draft Transportation Plan: Mr. Key advised the audience about locations in Whitefish and on line where the Transportation Plan can be read and reviewed. He encouraged the public and other interested parties to submit written comments on the Plan by January 31, 2008.

Next Steps: Mr. Key concluded his presentation by stating that it is up to the City-County Planning Board and City Council to adopt the Transportation Plan. He stated that additional opportunities to receive public comments on the Plan will occur at Planning Board meetings on January 17 and February 21 and at a future City Council hearing on the Transportation Plan (possibly during March). He then requested comments or questions from the audience.

Public Comments/Questions

The following public comments or questions were heard during the January 10 public meeting:

- **What is meant by a "parallel connector" and what is its purpose?** Mr. Key explained that a parallel connector is an alternate route that parallels an arterial roadway (like Spokane

Avenue). Jeff took the opportunity to provide information to the audience on functional classifications of roadways and the range of traffic volumes generally associated with each classification. However, it should be recognized that *federal functional classification doesn't correlate volumes to classifications*.

- **A bypass route has been advocated for a long time in Whitefish. Would the need for a bypass be offset if Spokane and Baker Avenues were configured as one-ways?** As indicated during the presentation, modeling done for the Transportation Plan suggests that future traffic volumes would still be significant even with a bypass in place. Mr. Key explained that the Corridor Study is taking a detailed look at a variety of potential configurations for Spokane and Baker Avenues. The work done for the Corridor Study will help establish the most desirable and effective long-term configuration for US 93.
- **The presence of large trucks in the downtown is undesirable and should be addressed now. Continuing the existing situation over the planning horizon is unacceptable.** Comment is noted.
- **Is there sufficient existing right-of-way along Wisconsin and Karrow Avenues to accommodate the recommended upgrades suggested in the Transportation Plan?** Mr. Key explained that he did not know for sure if existing rights-of-way would be sufficient to adequately improve these corridors. He noted that Wisconsin Avenue has a particularly narrow right-of-way. He also noted that the costs of right-of-way acquisition will be sizable for some projects but it may be possible to make some interim improvements without new right-of-way in some areas.
- **All major roads in Whitefish feed into the downtown area. If development continues in the center of the community, the need for a bypass will be greater.** Jeff commented that continuing development will point toward future revisions of the Transportation Plan and growth assumptions.
- **If Karrow Avenue is improved, won't it function as a "defacto" bypass?** Jeff acknowledged that if Karrow were improved, some people would undoubtedly find and use the roadway as an alternate route to US 93. The recommendations for Karrow Avenue contained in the Plan call for "context sensitive" reconstruction as the area becomes more developed. The roadway can be designed in a manner that would help influence the type of vehicles that can use the roadway and travel speeds.
- **I applaud you for putting recommendations forth in the Transportation Plan that can be commented on by the community.** One of the original reasons that a bypass was suggested years ago was the potential for a major impact on the downtown. With the downturn in logging presently underway, maybe logging trucks won't represent such a concern in the future.
- **Karrow is quite busy on the section between 7th and US 93.** Comment is noted.
- **South of 7th to US 93 (south of Whitefish) receives light vehicle traffic. This area**

would be difficult and expensive to improve due to the presence of wetlands and the need for three or more residential relocations (these properties exist nearly adjacent to the existing roadway). Several large property owners along Karrow Avenue have no desire to sell property or develop. There is not a very desirable location to join US 93 south of town due to the rolling terrain. Comment is noted.

Jeff asked if the audience saw the need for some improvements to Karrow Avenue. The general sentiment was that if development occurs, then it should be improved by the developers.

- **Can you provide information about the type of non-motorized improvements being proposed in the Plan?** Jeff stated that the Plan generally incorporates the recommendations and identified projects listed in the City's Pedestrian and Bicyclist Master Plan.
- **Baker and US 93 (2nd Street) poses a huge bottleneck due to the lack of a left turn lane. Adding such a feature could provide substantial traffic relief in the area.** Comment is noted.
- **Are there any short-term plans for addressing major issues like the congestion experienced at Baker and 2nd Street?** Jeff noted that the Plan does recommend various interim measures like adding left turn bays on 2nd Street or changing signal timings. He noted that such improvements may result in the loss of some on-street parking near the intersection and that there are right-of-way limitations on one corner of the intersection. He also indicated that various interim improvements have been recommended on the Wisconsin Avenue corridor.
- **Improving the south to north left turn movement at Baker and 2nd should be a high priority.** There is more room on the south side of the intersection than on the northside.
- **Is there any plan for removing police cars that routinely park along Baker Avenue?** John Wilson indicated that the City has started the process for developing a new emergency services center and a new building is still more than a year away from happening.
- **Is the Wisconsin Avenue bike path ever going to get built?** Jeff indicated that the bike path project had to be rebid due to high costs and few bidders last year. He noted that the project has been awarded and construction will begin this spring.
- **The proposed improvements to Old Morris Trail may not be viable as recommended due to the existence of a conservation easement on some property in the area.** Comment is noted.
- **A member of the audience suggested prioritizing those feasible measures that can help ease congestion in downtown Whitefish.** Comment is noted.
- **What kind of suggestions are in the Plan for public transportation?** Jeff stated that

public transportation is discussed in Chapter 9 and includes an idea for partnering with Glacier National Park to provide transit services in nearby communities like Whitefish. Glacier National Park will have a fleet of busses that won't be used year round so there may be an opportunity to use these vehicles for part of the year. He also mentioned some opportunities to develop transit services around special events in Whitefish like the 4th of July. Eagle Transit is exploring twice per day bus service between Whitefish and Kalispell.

Jeff commented that the Plan recommends planning for future transit (like bus pullouts) when new developments are being considered. The community could also consider establishing a bike rental program to enhance alternate transportation in the community.

- **Does the Plan contain any language about bus transportation from Whitefish to Kalispell?** Eagle Transit is exploring such service between Whitefish and Kalispell.
- **What about another railroad overpass? There is a need for such a facility due to enhance emergency response times within the community.** Proposed MSN-6 (Kalner Lane Extension) includes a new grade-separated crossing of the railroad. This location was chosen over several others because it crosses only a few railroad lines and other potential crossing locations would either have negative effects on residential neighborhoods or be too far out of town to provide much benefit.
- **How do you connect Kalner Lane to Highway 40 without creating another problem intersection?** The intersection of Kalner Lane and Highway 40 would require design modifications and reconfiguration to ensure it functions well for all traffic movements. This intersection would likely meet one of the eight required signal warrants and the installation of a signal or roundabout would accommodate traffic turning left or right from Kalner Lane.
- **When making the proposed east-west connection between 13th Street and Voerman Road (MSN-10), what types of difficulties do you envision?** This connection would require the construction of a new bridge across the Whitefish River. Acquiring right-of-way and constructing a bridge would be expensive. Road and bridge construction also have the potential to impact wetlands and the riparian habitat.
- **Twenty years ago the general feeling in many communities (including Whitefish) was that a bypass could kill a small town. Now the situation has changed in Whitefish so that if we don't get a bypass it will harm the downtown. Before the idea of a bypass is dropped, it is essential that folks recognize that through traffic from Canada and other growth areas north of Whitefish will continue to create traffic impacts in Whitefish.** Comment is noted.
- **I appreciate that the Transportation Plan does not support a bypass. Traffic from logging and chip trucks is slowing.** Comment is noted.
- **Wildlife populations need to be considered when planning for transportation since conflicts between wildlife and traffic can occur.** Comment is noted. Jeff pointed out that current highway designs often contain accommodations for wildlife like over or under

crossings and ensuring fish passage in culverts.

- **Has anyone investigated Farm-to-Market Road as a truck bypass?** Jeff stated that Farm-to-Market Road is generally too far west of Whitefish to have much of an effect on traffic flows in town. Such routes need to be convenient to be attractive alternatives to existing routes.
- **If a bypass route is considered, it must connect to Highway 40 since trucks are often headed for destinations to the east and already use that highway.** Comment is noted.
- **How much would a bypass cost?** Very preliminary cost estimates were prepared for the four western route alternatives evaluated in the Transportation Plan. These options had potential construction costs ranging from \$4 to \$10 million which could be low given the cost of land for right-of-way in the Flathead Valley. There are also considerable costs for preliminary design engineering activities that would be incurred, typically about 10-15% of the construction cost.
- **What is the process from this point forward and how do projects recommended in the Plan get implemented?** Jeff responded that the draft Transportation Plan will be reviewed at a Planning Board work session on January 17 and at a public hearing held by the Planning Board in February. The City Council will also conduct a public hearing on the Transportation Plan and will be asked to formally adopt the Plan.

Implementing individual projects will require decisions from MDT, the City and the County depending upon the road system (state-maintained or local systems) affected by the projects. Projects under the jurisdiction of MDT would be subject to their project development procedures and activities. Major projects under the jurisdiction of the City would be advanced through the City's Capital Improvements Program and budgeting processes. Public review and comment opportunities for individual projects would typically be available as projects are being developed by both MDT and the City.

- **The figure showing recommended improvements (Figure 8-1) shows various lines going across lands where no roads exist. Would these lines affect the sale of property? Are these lines "set in stone"?** Jeff stated that the lines represent potentially desirable transportation links for the community's transportation network. However, if there is no development planned for a property crossed by one of the "lines" then nothing is likely to happen. John Wilson also commented that the City would not be involved in the sale of property where a new road was proposed. They would only be involved when a plan to develop the property came up for consideration by the City. In that case, the City would refer to the Transportation Plan recommendations and request that the developer provide right-of-way or at least plan for a future roadway.
- ***(Written Comment from Scott Sorenson left at the meeting)* As a four-term (I was just appointed to my fifth term) Whitefish City-County Planning Board member, I think the two biggest needed major projects are 1) Wisconsin Avenue from the viaduct to Whitefish Mountain Resort Road and 2) a car/truck 93 bypass on the west**

side of town. Both have been needed for years. Everything else is less needed.
Comments are noted.

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Whitefish Transportation Plan 2008 Public Meeting

- *When: January 10, 2008 7-9pm**
- *Where: O'Shaughnessy Center**
- *Formal Presentation Begins at 7:15pm with Open House to follow**
- *Winners of the Whitefish Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest Will be Announced at 7pm**
- *Refreshments will be provided**

The city of Whitefish, the Montana Department of Transportation (MDT) and Robert Peccia & Associates (RPA) will be holding a public meeting to present the draft *Whitefish Transportation Plan*. The Plan contains important recommendations to strengthen the city's transportation system and encourage multi-modal transportation.

The draft plan can be viewed on the project website at www.mdt.mt.gov/pubinvolve/whitefish beginning Saturday, January 5, 2008. In addition, hard copies will be available at the City's Public Works Department on Monday, January 7. Comments on the draft Plan will be solicited until January 31, 2008. Comments can be submitted via the project website, or by mail to the following address: Robert Peccia & Associates, c/o Jeff Key, P.E., PO Box 5653, Helena, Mt. 59601. For further information you may call Karin Hilding, Senior Project Engineer, City of Whitefish 863-2450.

Thanks to the Walking Man Frame Shop for their assistance with the Whitefish Transportation Plan Kids Art Contest.



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PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3
January 10th, 2008



NAME	ADDRESS/P.O. Box	CITY	Email Address
Courtney Feldt	410 Iowa Ave	WF	courtmt@bksnan.net
Pat & Kim Conrad	112 Old West	WF	
Terri Nichols	109 8th St. W.	WF	
Tom Thomas	P.O. Box 5588	WF	
Paul Johanson	P.O. Box 1248	WF	
Sheila Bower	P.O. Box 1120	WF	
Maria Duenas	1465 Lakeside Ln W/F		
Bob Feldt	1016 Greenwood	WF	
Karen Reeves	230 Mossy Ln	WF	
Greg Gunderson	840 1st St.	WF	

SHEET 1 of 6

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PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3
January 10th, 2008

WHITEFISH TRANSPORTATION PLAN

NAME	ADDRESS / P.O. Box	City	Email Address
Great Northern Cycles	104 O'Brien Ave	Whitefish	greatnortherncycles@gmail.com
KEN & MARIE MECKEL	1129 W. 7 th ST	WF	
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Klaus Heinrich	610 Monrovia	WF	
John Chaney	609 Baker	WF	
MARGARET MURDOCK	185 REXVOLD	WF	

SHEET 2 of 6

WHITEFISH

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

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PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3
January 10th, 2008

NAME	ADDRESS/P.O. Box	City	Email Address
SHARLOT BATTIN	185 REDBROOK RD.	WF	
JEANNE TALAMAN	967 COLORADO AVE.	WF.	
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Ted Belcer	230 Mendocino Rd	WF	
KEN & MAUREEN CORDOZA	150 Lost Coast Trail	WF	
JEFF CAUSEN	215 Armory	WF	
George Shryock	6 Rwantail	WF	

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PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3
January 10th, 2008



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SHEET 4 of 6

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PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3
January 10th, 2008



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SHEET 5 of 6

WHITEFISH

TRANSPORTATION PLAN

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PUBLIC MEETING NO. 3
January 10th, 2008

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Shelia Ludlow	MDT		

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